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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000509

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/21/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 11/16: PM QARASE WON'T CAPITULATE;
INQUIRES ABOUT FOREIGN INTERVENTION

REF: A. USDAO SUVA 201455Z NOV 06

[1](#)B. SUVA 506

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Commander Bainimarama indicated publicly on Nov. 21 what he told Embassy DATT privately on Nov. 20 (Ref A): that he intends to remove the Qarase Government o/a Dec. 4. Diplomats met with Home Affairs Minister Vosanibola and PM Qarase, and also informed Police Commissioner Hughes, about Bainimarama's clear statement of intent to remove the Government. Vosanibola asked the diplomats to request their governments to re-emphasize to Bainimarama the costs of a coup. Qarase described all of Bainimarama's demands as unconstitutional, said the Government cannot capitulate, and inquired if foreign intervention might be possible. The PM's Office has heard from President Iloilo's office that, contrary to Bainimarama's description (Ref A), the President did not provide the Commodore a "green light" to act yesterday. We will continue to seek opportunities to attempt to influence the Commander, though our impression is his focus is entirely domestic: to remove Qarase, no matter what the cost. End summary.

Bainimarama says publicly: Army to act in two weeks

[1](#)2. (C) Ref. A described a conversation last evening, Nov. 20, between RFMF Commander Bainimarama and the Embassy DATT in which Bainimarama made clear he intends to remove the Qarase Government o/a December 1-4, unless it capitulates on all demands. Bainimarama suggested that he had received a "green light" for his plans from President Iloilo earlier in the day. In a media interview in Fijian on the morning of Nov. 21 prior to flying to New Zealand to visit family, Bainimarama reportedly stated that "the military will move in to take action in relation to their demands if the government does not act within the next two weeks." Bainimarama reiterated that, if PM Qarase does not meet all RFMF demands, "the military will commence its work in two weeks time."

Diplomats consult with PM and Home Affairs Minister

[1](#)3. (C) Given the somber news of the Commodore's firm intention to commit a serious criminal act, which the DATT had shared with his Australian and New Zealand colleagues, the Ambassador met with the High Commissioners of Australia, New Zealand, and the UK today, Nov. 21. They agreed to seek an appointment with Home Affairs Minister Vosanibola, plus PM Qarase, if available. The Aussie High Commissioner also conveyed the news to Police Commissioner Hughes.

Minister asks US, others to re-lobby Bainimarama

14. (C) Minister Vosanibola met with the group in the afternoon. That was followed by a meeting with the PM. We conveyed the essence of the news to both leaders. They had earlier been briefed by Commissioner Hughes. Home Affairs CEO Ligairi said he had just received a phone call from an impeccable source at the Army camp reporting that the plan is to kidnap several senior Ministers, including the PM. Ligairi had received no word about timing. Vosanibola asked the diplomats to re-emphasize to Bainimarama the costs of engineering a coup. Vosanibola asked New Zealand High Commissioner Green, in particular, if his government could attempt to influence Bainimarama during his current visit to Wellington. Green said the NZ Government is contemplating such a conversation, including a reminder that a coup could well mean no more visits to the family in New Zealand. Ambassador Dinger noted that the USG intends to continue attempts to persuade Bainimarama against a coup.

PM inquires about foreign intervention

15. (C) In the meeting with PM Qarase, he described all six of Bainimarama's demands as "unconstitutional," given the limited role the RFMF Commander is allowed under the 1997 Constitution. Qarase said it would be impossible to capitulate and retain a democracy. Asked what the Government has in mind to prepare for or respond to Bainimarama's plan, Qarase seemed at a loss. He did ask: "What is the possibility of foreign intervention? We are working to save democracy here." Aussie High Commissioner Rawson noted it is possible to ask the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) leaders for intervention; however, she suggested it might be a tough call. As the PM's CEO had noted in a side conversation while

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waiting for the PM, the specter of foreign intervention could actually help unite the Fijian community against the outside threat. At that, Qarase noted that, with modern, precision technology, a foreign force would not necessarily have to actually invade. Qarase and Vosanibola moved on from the diplomatic meeting to a session of the National Security Council.

PM's Office is told President gave no "green light"

16. (C) In the meetings, the diplomats inquired about the "green light" that Bainimarama said President Iloilo had provided. The PM's office had checked with the President's Official Secretary, who gave assurance that the Bainimarama-Iloilo meeting had been purely a kava ceremony, and there was no discussion at all of the RFMF's plans against the Qarase Government. Note: The diplomats had agreed that NZ High Commissioner Green, who was scheduled to have dinner with Vice President Madraiwiwi this evening, would seek insights from the VP about the Presidential meeting. Unfortunately, in late p.m. the NZ HighComm received word that Madraiwiwi has been admitted to hospital.

Comment

17. (C) We will continue to seek further insight into what took place between the President and Commodore at Government House, although under Fiji's constitutional system, the President would only have authority to provide a "green light" for the RFMF Commander to act if advised to do so by the PM. That will not happen. We don't know if Qarase will formalize a request for international intervention. If he does, everyone would expect Australia and New Zealand to be the ones approached. As for lobbying Bainimarama, we have done so and will gladly continue to do so; however, we have no expectation that international pressure is a factor in Bainimarama's calculations. Our sense is his focus is entirely domestic: to clean out what he sees as the tainted Qarase Government and to protect himself and senior RFMF

officers from prosecution, no matter what the cost.

18. (C) On a side note, Bainimarama has indicated publicly he doesn't want to commence action during school exams, which end Dec. 1. Another more likely explanation for the Dec. 1-4 deadline is that the annual Army-Police rugby match, the Ratu Sukuna Bowl, is to take place Dec. 1. In Fiji, rugby rules. Believe it or not.

DINGER